



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

*September 9, 2005*- The political landscape has drastically changed within the past few weeks. The Congress and specifically the Senate, already had a full plate for the Fall with confirmation hearings and a vote on the Supreme Court nomination of John Roberts (now a candidate for the chief justice post), a difficult reconciliation bill, several appropriations bills, and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Now, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, additional relief legislation for the victims will be needed, as will hearings to look into the federal response to the disaster. Due to this overwhelmingly large agenda, it is highly likely that the Congress will not adjourn before Thanksgiving or even later.

Regarding Perkins – despite the many important items listed above, we are still cautiously optimistic about this legislation reaching conference committee and passage during the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. The positive note is that Perkins remains on the priority list for both the Senate HELP and House Education and the Workforce committees and looks as if it could still reach completion this year barring any unforeseen roadblocks with HEA reauthorization or judicial nominations. The biggest question that remains is - will they have enough time to get everything done, and that remains to be seen.

**SENATE HELP COMMITTEE APPROVES HEA BILL:** On September 6, after months of waiting, the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee introduced their language to reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1998. S.1614, the Higher Education Amendments Act of 2005 (HEA), which is intended to continue helping America build and retain a powerful workforce, was marked up and unanimously passed out of committee two days later.

HELP Committee Chairman, Michael Enzi (R-WY) stated that *"this bill will help retain America's competitive edge in the global economy by ensuring that higher education prepares today's students for the demands of tomorrow's workplace."* He also explained that by 2020, the nation will need an additional 14 million skilled workers than can currently be provided under today's system, and that the Congress is looking for HEA to coordinate with Perkins, the Workforce Investment Act, and other federal programs to ensure that America's workforce is prepared and competitive.



## Highlights of S. 1614

- Establishes “Pro Gap,” a temporary new mandatory \$4.5 billion student aid program for low-income students to help pay for college as well as authorizes \$1 billion in smart grants for students in their third and fourth years majoring in math, science or foreign language fields;
- Relaxes the 50 percent rule to permit schools to expand distance education offerings and establish a new requirement that the Sec. of Education make public information about the costs of attending postsecondary programs;
- Revises the use of funds under the State and partnership grants to meet the demand for “highly qualified teachers” under NCLB as well as enhance the use of technology in instruction;
- Reauthorizes programs to support Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Native Hawaiian and Alaskan Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Professional or Graduate Institutions for minority serving institutions;
- Reauthorizes the Federal Perkins Loan program which permits institutions to operate revolving loan funds. It also allows families with adjusted gross income levels below \$20,000 to automatically claim zero expected family contribution in needs analysis;
- Creates a new grant program to support graduate programs at Hispanic Serving Institutions, similar to programs already established for Historically Black Colleges and Universities; and
- Authorizes a series of grant programs to help institutions of higher education develop new curriculum and services related to high skill and high growth occupations.

**BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS:** Due to the Senate’s busy schedule and hierarchy of priorities, the Senate Labor, Health, Human Services and Education (Labor H) appropriations bill is still showing no signs of moving forward. This bill, which includes the discretionary spending levels all programs under Perkins, is one of seven appropriations bills unfinished in the Senate. Its counterpart in the House has been completed and is waiting for the Senate to move forward.

At this juncture, it is likely that the Labor H appropriations bill will either become part of an omnibus appropriations bill (where all unfinished appropriations bills are coupled together into one piece of legislation) or a continuing resolution which continues funding for federal programs past the start of the new fiscal year when new legislation has not yet been passed.

While both the Basic State Grant and Tech Prep received level funding in both bills, funding is eliminated for Tech Prep Demo (\$4.9 million) and Section 118, Occupational and Employment Information Program (\$9.3 million). In addition to those cuts, the Senate bill also eliminates funding for National Programs (\$11.6



million). It is highly likely that these numbers will remain the same whether passed in an omnibus or separate bill.

**EDUCATION STEPS UP TO PLATE:** In the midst of the tragedy brought on by Hurricane Katrina, there is a success story worth noting. Among those displaced by the hurricane were hundreds of thousands of students, both K-12 and postsecondary, with little direction of what to do or where to go to continue their education. Nearly every state public education and higher education system has stepped up to the plate with an “open arms” policy, welcoming students to study wherever space can be provided. Because of this generous attitude, several members of Congress have publicly recognized and praised the education community’s response.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Nichole Jackson, Director of Government Affairs at [NJackson@careertech.org](mailto:NJackson@careertech.org).

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